

Partial Text of Haig's Statement for Senators in Confirmation Hearing

Partial text of statement of Alexander Haig Jr. for the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Jan. 9, 1981.

Mr. Chairman: I am pleased to appear before this distinguished committee. We have in this century been often called to shed our blood for the cause of the free world, and in an ingenious and generous plan designed by a great army general and secretary of state, George C. Marshall, we helped, after the most devastating war in history, rebuild Europe and strengthen civilization.

Our record in this century is not perfect, but it should be a source of great pride. Our successes were founded on a firm commitment to our ideals combined with a sense of the realities of human nature and international politics.

The earlier the Reagan administration articulates its approach to these issues, the better the nations of the world and the people of our own nation will be. . . . I have spent 35 of the 37 years in public service. . . . Nevertheless, my nomination has stimulated renewed interest among some of a few events during that service — events that occurred during the four years that I served on the Staff of the National Security Council, from January 1969 to January 1973, and during the time that I served as chief of staff in the White House from May 1973 to September 1974.

Most of these events have been thoroughly investigated in general, and my role in particular has been scrutinized meticulously. I have testified at length under oath eight times concerning my role in many of these incidents.

None of these investigations have found any culpability on my part. . . . In an appendix to this statement, I have set forth the facts on certain events in which Senator (Cia) Robert Pell (D-R.I.) has expressed an interest. . . . I would, however, like to underscore how I viewed Watergate while I was White House chief of staff. . . .

● I believed that President Nixon was entitled to the presumption of innocence, until proven otherwise. . . . In that context, I worked hard within the boundaries of the law and the advice of the lawyers to support him. . . .

● I also believe passionately in the office of the presidency and the awesome ability of that office to inspire its occupants to consider constantly the judgment of history and to work for the broad public interest. . . . I viewed my overriding duty as one to preserve that office in the national interest. . . .

● Although Watergate was obviously important during my tenure as chief of staff, I spent 90 percent of my time trying to assure that the other business of the presidency was properly conducted. . . .

Now, Mr. Chairman, let me move to the present and the future. There is now widespread agreement that the years immediately ahead will be unusually difficult. The evidence of that danger is everywhere. . . .

● In Europe, still the fulcrum of the East-West balance, Soviet military power once again casts an ominous shadow over the efforts of an East European people to assert fundamental freedoms of association and expression. . . .

● In the Middle East, an uneasy peace continues to be purchased by blood and reprisals, with each such sequence threatening renewed and wider conflict. . . .

● At the head of the Persian Gulf, war between Iran and Iraq threatens the very lifeline of many national economies. Iran itself, once a major force for regional stability, lurches from demonstration to demonstration in a state of near anarchy. Meanwhile, not far to the East, 85,000 Soviet troops brutalize Afghanistan in the first major post-World War II employment of Soviet troops outside the area the Soviets have heretofore considered their sphere of influence. . . .

● In Asia, southern enemies face one another across a 500-mile line from Thailand to the Manchurian frontier. On the Korean Peninsula, only a fragile truce permits nearly 30 years after the formal cessation of Korean hostilities. . . .

● In Africa, Southeast Asia, Central America and the Caribbean, turmoil and violence stunt national development, and invite terrorism from within and adventurism from without, as millions of human beings starve and thousands of new refugees seek shelter each day. . . .

It is no wonder the 1980s have been called a decade of crisis. Yet, it is precisely that sort of appraisal which I believe we must reject. The very term "crisis" implies that events are out of control, and that we are not in control. . . .

Today we face a world in which power in a variety of forms has become diffused among over 150 nations. Adjustment of relations with and among so many separate governments would be difficult enough, even were all equally reasonable and equally committed to stability and peace. But many are willing to foment instability and violence to achieve their objectives. That reality alone should argue for better coordination of policies among the free nations. . . .

Our collective vulnerability to international unrest is matched by a socio-economic challenge that we all share. The growing interdependence of our economies, and the continued reliance on foreign sources of energy and raw materials, have stripped the West of its independent and collective resilience which once allowed one nation's economic strength to bolster another's momentary weakness. . . .

Much of the fragmentation of power, has occurred in the so-called "Third World" — a misleading term if ever there was one. It has become abundantly clear in the last decade or so, it is that the common goal of development, progress, and by extension, U.S. foreign policy — implied by the term "Third World" is a myth, and a dangerous one at that. . . .

Recent American foreign policy has suffered from the misperception which lumps together nations as diverse as Brazil and Libya, Indonesia and South Yemen, Cuba and Kuwait, and which has too frequently produced attempts to cut the national pattern to fit the foreign policy cloth. This failure to tailor policy to the individual circumstances of developing nations has frequently aggravated the very internal stresses which Western policy should seek instead to diminish. . . .

Difficulties in this regard have hardly been lessened by our propensity to apply to these emerging states Western standards which resolutely ignore vast differences in their cultural, political development, economic vitality, and internal and external security. . . .

These fundamental problems — the diffusion of power, the interdependence of the allied community, and the failure to recognize the variety among the so-called Third World Nations — are made more intractable by what is perhaps the central strategic phenomenon of the Post-World War II era: the transformation of Soviet military power from a continental and largely defensive land army to a global offensive Army, Navy and Air Force fully capable of supporting an imperial foreign policy. Considered in conjunction with the episodic nature of the West's military response, this tremendous accumulation of power might have produced perhaps the most complete reversal of global power relationships ever seen in a period of relative peace. Today, the threat of Soviet military intervention colors attempts to achieve international civility. Unchecked, the growth of Soviet military power eventually paralyze Western policy altogether. . . .

These, then, are fundamental problems which challenge American foreign policy, and the future of the democracies generally. To say that is not to diminish the importance of other Western goals: the eradication of hunger, poverty and disease, the expansion of the free world, and the promotion of the spread of social justice, and through these and similar efforts, the improvement of the human condition. . . .

The United States has a clear choice. We can continue, if we wish, to react to events as they occur — serially, unselectively, and increasingly in the final analysis, unilaterally. One lesson of Afghanistan is certainly that few symptomatic crises are capable of effectively reducing the collective energies of the free world. We may wish it were otherwise, but wishing will not make it so. . . .

Alternatively, we can confront the fundamental issues I have discussed. We can seek actively to shape events and, in the process, attempt to forge consensus among like-minded peoples. Such a consensus will enable us to deal with the more fundamental tasks I have outlined: the dismantling of Soviet power; the reestablishment of an orderly international economic climate; the economic and political maturation of developing nations to the benefit of their peoples; and the achievement of a reasonable standard of international civility. Acting alone, each of these tasks is beyond even our power; acting together, all are within the capacity of free nations. . . .

If we are to succeed in this effort, the conduct of American foreign policy must be characterized above all by three qualities. . . .

First, we must act with consistency. Specific issues may furnish the occasion for action, but they cannot constitute the sole basis for policy. Once we accept that the specific issues facing us today are merely surface manifestations of more fundamental problems, it must also be clear that effective policy cannot be created anew daily, informed solely by our immediate need. To do so risks misperception by our adversaries, loss of confidence by our allies, and confusion among our own people. U.S. policy has been most effective — in Europe and the Middle East, for example — where consistent U.S. interests have been consistently pursued. . . .

Second, we must behave reliably. American power and prestige should not be lightly committed; but once made, a commitment must be honored. Our friends cannot be expected to share in the burdens and risks of collective action if they cannot count on the word of the United States. Our adversaries cannot be expected to exercise prudence if they perceive our resolve to be hostage to the exigencies of the moment. Those whose posture toward us remains to be determined cannot be expected to decide in favor of friendship if they cannot confidently assess the benefits of association with us. . . .

Finally, and in some ways most important, American foreign policy must demonstrate balance, both in our approach to individual issues, and in the orchestration of policy generally. By balance, I mean recognizing that complex issues invariably require us to weigh, and somehow reconcile, a variety of pressures, often competing. Thus, for example: . . .

● I believe that equitable and verifiable arms control contributes to security. But restraint in the growth and proliferation of armaments will be achieved by policies which increase the very insecurities that promote arms competition. . . .

● Domestic economic stability will not be enhanced by the establishment of short-sighted, economic barriers which undermine the multilateral cooperation essential to the prosperity of all. . . .

● The assurance of basic human liberties will not be improved by replacing friendly governments which incompletely satisfy our standards of democracy with hostile ones which are even less benign. . . .

● And our commitment to peace will not be furthered by abdicating the right to exercise military power to only the most ruthless members of the international community. . . .

Balance must also be struck in the orchestration of policy generally. In our selection of the issues we choose to address; in the priority we accord them; and in understanding the relationship of individual issues, one to another, and each to our broad policy objectives. This form of balance has become known as linkage, and the president-elect has publicly stated his commitment to it. . . .

Consistently, reliability, balance. These three attributes are essential, not because they guarantee a successful foreign policy — nothing can do that — but because their absence guarantees an unsuccessful one. Unfortunately, as De Tocqueville pointed out long ago, these are precisely the qualities which a democracy finds most difficult to muster. . . .

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As I testified, this issue also came to my attention shortly after I arrived at the White House. I took only one action of any significance: At the request of the President, I obtained the name of an attorney from White House counsel Leonard Garment, and transmitted the name of that attorney to Mr. C.G. "Bebe" Rebozo as a lawyer that he might retain in connection with an IRS investigation. . . .

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My knowledge and views of the contents of tapes came from either the White House legal staff or President Nixon himself. . . .

2) The 18½-Minute Gap I never physically had any tape nor possession of it, and I explained in two days of testimony before Judge Sirica my limited and arms to the negotiations. Those negotiations did resume on January 23, and led to the agreement that President Nixon announced on Jan. 23, 1973, and led to the return of U.S. prisoners of war in the spring of 1973. . . .

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